

THE OBITS OF THE ABBOTS OF COLCHESTER.

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IN June, 1920, in pursuance of a long dreamt of pilgrimage, all but undertaken on the eve of the Great War, which caused that and many other plans to go astray, I visited Oxford.

To an Essex man Pembroke college, where Morant studied hard by the rooms afterwards occupied by Samuel Johnson, was deeply interesting, and not the less that one of my sons was then an undergraduate there, but every college had its own associations with historic memories and romance.

It would not have been fitting for a keeper of books to leave Oxford without a visit to the Bodleian, where Dr. E. A. Cowley, Bodley's librarian, meets the humblest student with such kindly courtesy and ready assistance.

Naturally delving into Essex MSS. the following entry in the catalogue at once drew my attention :

17914 In Latin, on paper : written in the 16th cent. : 8" inches by 6" inches, 28 leaves.

'Exemplar hic incipit tabule sine temporum fasciculi in monasterii (sancti Johannis Evangeliste [*sic*]) Colcestrensis sacra edependentis 'beg. 'Caput mundi. Prima die mundi creatus est mundus': a short chronicle to A.D. 1382, written in A.D. 1526, and here copied not long after. It is divided into seven parts. (1) general, (2) monastic orders, (3) 'construccionnes quorundam monasteriorum,' (4) 'Bellum regum Angelorum,' (5) 'Obitus quorundam regum Anglie,' (6) De Colecestria et Coele,' (7) 'Qualiter cenobium Colcestriese inceperit,' and 'de obitu abbatum nuius ecclesie.' The parchment cover bears a large coloured initial.

No. 3440 in some 18th cent, sale, now MS , Gough, Essex, 1.

Article No. 7 appeared to me the most promising, and a cursory inspection showed that it contained interesting information, both as to the foundation of the abbey, the tenures of office by the various abbots and as to Colchester, which had never, to my knowledge, yet appeared in print.

By kind permission of Bodley's librarian, a rotograph was taken of this section of the MS. which, although written in somewhat corrupt monkish Latin, I have endeavoured to translate literally and now append, with such few notes as appear necessary to elucidate it. It will be seen that this account confirms in part that of Marianus, used by Dugdale in his *Monasticon*, but also differs from it in certain

particulars, while the accompanying chronological list of the succession of the abbots, for the most part confirmed by outside evidence, for the first time fixes the sequence of the earlier rulers of the monastery. The definite statement as to Eudo's coming over with the Conqueror is interesting, and so too is that of the burning of Colchester in 1133.

The dates belonging to the first seven abbots had never hitherto been definitely ascertained ; as given here they contradict no known facts, and may therefore be assumed to be correct. The main alteration in what has hitherto been accepted as approximately correct is in the length of rule of abbot Hugh of York.

It will be noticed that abbot Thomas Moveron, assent to whose election was given by Edward III. on 10 July, 1353, and who was gone in 1358, is omitted and that Simon de Blyton is credited with the full period between 1349-1368. It may also be worth recording that Morant's list, as well as that given by Mr. Stuart Moore in his introduction to the *Cartulary*, is vitiated by the accidental inclusion of three priors of St. Botolph between 1391 and 1412.

TRANSLATION.

HOW THE MONASTERY AT COLCHESTER WAS UNDERTAKEN.

NOW, when Eudo had obtained the custody of Colchester castle, with all that belonged to it, delighted with the pleasantness of the place, he determined to build a monastery in the northern (*sic*, *acquiloniali*) part of the city. Maurice, bishop of London, being consulted, praised the plan, promised help and gave his sanction to it.

So, in 1095, about the eighth year of King William the younger, on 29th August, by the favour of God, the ground was measured out in the presence of the said bishop, and, in the following year, after Easter, the work was put in hand. Eudo himself laid the first foundation stone, his gracious wife, the lady Rohesia, the second, Earl Gilbert de Clare, the brother of that lady, the third, while the fourth and later stones were rightly and duly laid by certain nobles who were present.

Eudo was, at that time, known to and friendly with Gundulf, then bishop of Rochester, and in 1099 asked him to send him two monks from the monastery at Rochester, who should live as regulars in his new monastery and be maintained by the daily wages of Eudo.

But these men, accustomed to delicacies and nourished on them, since they were seldom satisfied, began to murmur and in a short time returned, disgusted, to the monastery whence they came. Others were sent in their place, one of whom named Ralph, a

religious and industrious man, at once urged Eudo to endow the place, saying that it was not meet that men subject to rule should depend on the laity for their daily bread. As nothing, however, seemed to go right in the whole affair, these also gave up and returned home in 1101. Afterwards Eudo attracted the notice of Stephen, abbot of York, who chose thirteen of his monks, according to the number of the Apostles, and sent them to the work of the monastery of Colchester, and one of them, Hugh by name, who discharged the office of prior amongst them, being elected to the abbot's office, was consecrated by Maurice, bishop of London, in the year 1102 (*i.e.* between 10 February and 24 March, 1103).

Now the fabric of the whole said church was finished in its happy consummation and dedicated, on 10 February, 1115-6, by Richard, bishop of London, and Herbert, bishop of Norwich, in the sixteenth year of King Henry the elder and the twenty-first from its foundation.

In this year, certain dissensions having arisen between abbot Hugh and Eudo, the former resigned and gave up charge of the abbey into the king's hand, returning to York, whence he came, in the thirteenth year of his consecration.

At length, on the prayer of Eudo and the king's command, Gilbert de Lungevile, a monk of Bec, and, at that time, prior of Evremont, in Normandy, succeeded him in the bereaved church, and was consecrated by Richard, bishop of London, on 10 July, 1116; under whom and afterwards under the abbots whose names follow, with the co-operation of the divine mercy, Holy Religion came to those who sought it, and to other living saints of God, one instructing another for the serving of God.

CONCERNING THE DEATHS OF THE ABBOTS OF THIS CHURCH.

1120-1.

16 Feb. Eudo, the founder of this church, died in Normandy, but being translated thence he is buried here in the fifty fifth year of his arrival in England with the Conqueror.

1121-2.

7 Jan. Rohesia, his venerable wife, died in Normandy and was honourably interred in the monastery at Bec.

1133.

This monastery and nearly the whole of Colchester were burnt, and all the workshops, which were originally on the north side, under the town wall, were removed to the south side of the church.

1140.

17 Aug. Abbot Gilbert de Lungvyle died in the twenty-fifth year of his consecration.

1142.

15 July. Abbot William de Scury died in the second year of his consecration.

1158-9.

21 Jan. Abbot Hugh de Haya died in the seventeenth year of his consecration.

1168.
 30 Aug. Abbot Gilbert de Wicham died in the tenth year of his consecration.
 1184. (?)
 16 July. Abbot Walter of Wales died in the seventeenth (*sic*) year of his consecration.
 1194.
 23 Dec. Abbot Osbert died in the tenth year of his consecration.
 1238-9. (?)
 20 Feb. Abbot Adam de Campes died in the forty-fourth year of his consecration. (The correct year is 1237-8, as given by the Patent Roll.)
 1245. Abbot William de Wauda resigned his pastoral office in the eighth year of his consecration.
 1271. (?)
 29 June. Abbot William de Spaldwik died in the twenty-seventh year of his consecration. (The correct year is 1272, as given by the Patent Roll.)
 1306.
 13 Oct. Abbot Robert de Greenstede died in the thirty-sixth year of his consecration. (This date is confirmed by Chancery Warrants, 55, 5518.)
 1311.
 31 Oct. Abbot John de Bruges died in the sixth year of his consecration.
 1326.
 15 Nov. Abbot Walter de Huntyngfelde died in the sixteenth year of his consecration.
 30 Aug. Abbot William de Glemham died in the first year of his consecration. (Confirmed by Chancery Eccl. Petit., 21, 38.)
 1349.
 24 Aug. Abbot John de Wymondham died in the twenty-third year of his consecration. (In Eccl. Petit., 26, 15, the date is given as 25 August.)
 1368.
 29 Nov. Abbot Simon de Blyton died in the twentieth year of his consecration. (Sudbury's Register, f. 123, has 3 Dec. This is probably correct, as Eccl. Pat., 29, 44, asking licence to elect, is dated 4 December.)
 1369.
 8 Oct. Abbot Thomas Stucle died. (Date confirmed by Eccl. Petit., 30, 12.)
 1375.
 26 July. Abbot Richard de Colne died in the sixth year of his consecration (Date confirmed by Eccl. Petit., 31, 33), and on 26 October following (*sic*).
 1377.
 26 Oct. Abbot John Dedham died. (This, the correct date, is given by Eccl. Petit., 32, 4.)
 1380.
 24 Nov. Abbot William de Gritton died in the third year of his consecration. (In Eccl. Petit., 32, 26, the date is given as 25 October, but this is probably wrong, as licence for election was granted on 27 November.)

The manuscript ends here, but it may be convenient to complete the series by giving the exact dates of the deaths of the later abbots down to the Dissolution. These are well known, and will be found in Mr. R. C. Fowler's account of the abbey in *V.C.H. Essex*, vol. xi., p. 101, with full references to the authorities in each case.

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1415.
1 Aug. Abbot Geoffrey Story died. (Eccl. Petit., 39, 18.)
1418.
23 Oct. Abbot Roger Best died. (Exch. K. R. Escheators' Inq., file 1204.)
1432.
28 July Abbot Robert Gritton died on Monday after St. James. (*Ibid.*, file 1214.)
1464.
23 May. Abbot William Ardeley, or Hunt, died. (*Ibid.*, file 1078.)
1468.
13 July. Abbot John Canon died (*Ibid.*, file 820.)
1497.
14 Dec.(?) Abbot Walter Stansted died; his successor paid for the temporalities from this date. (Pat. 13 Hen. VII., m. 15.)
1517.
21 June. Abbot William Lyndesey, or Sprowton, died. (Fitzjames Register, 121-6.)
1523.
20 July. Abbot John Stoke resigned. (Tunstall Register, 34-9)
1533.
25 Mar. Abbot Thomas Barton died (Stokesley Register, 68-70.)
1539.
1 Dec. Abbot Thomas Marshall, or Beche, died.

Mr. R. C. Fowler has most kindly supplied the references to the later abbots and checked those given in the MS. for the earlier ones so far as data are available. I have also to acknowledge the kind assistance of Mr. I. H. Jeayes with several obscure passages in the Latin original.